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Mr Stevenson

THOUGHTS
ON TRUTH, ON PREJUDICE,
AND
ON SINCERITY.

BY

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ON THE NATURE AND ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH; AND OF SINCERITY IN THE PROFESSION OF IT.

WHEN the artful and wicked Pilate wiſhed to draw from Jeſus Chriſt the acknowledgment, that he was a king, the Meſſiah not only aſſured him, that his kingdom was not of this world, but addreſſed him in theſe ſtriking words: "For this end was I "born, and for this cauſe came I into the world, that I "might bear witneſs unto the truth." John xviii. 37. "Pilate ſaid unto him, WHAT IS TRUTH?" v. 38.

If this queſtion be put with the deſire of information, none can be more important.

It is probable, however, that the Roman governor was little intereſted to receive inſtruction from Jeſus Chriſt, but was rather deſirous to procure from him what would juſtify his approaching condemnation.

Gladly would Pilate have had nothing to do with him; but he himſelf had been guilty of ſo much injuſtice and oppreſſion, that he durſt not reſiſt the clamorous demand of the Jews for the crucifixion of the Meſſiah.

His deeds might have come to light, and he have been deprived of his government, if he had oppoſed the proceedings of the Jews againſt one accuſed of ſeditious and treaſonable practices.

In ſuch circumſtances, therefore, it is moſt probable, that Pilate meant only to deride or to confound Jeſus Chriſt by the queſtion, *what is truth?* His meaning might be, "The children of men are ſo various in their ſentiments, that it is difficult, if not impoſſible, to know who are in the right. Amidſt the endleſs ſpeculations of the enquiring, who can point out what is certain and true? Is it not, then, eaſier, ſafer, and better, to ſit down contented with what is already certainly known; and to remain in perfect ignorance and indifference concerning the reſt of the truth?"

If ſuch were Pilate's notions, there is little difference between them and another interpretation, which has been put upon his words.

They, who enquire in ſo careleſs and ſcoffing a manner, "what is truth," are likelieſt to adopt the other meaning attributed to the queſtion of the governor, "what is truth *to me?*"

"If it be ſo difficult to be acquired, the children of men," it may be thought, "might as well go on in their errors, as waſte their time in ſo uncertain and fruitleſs a ſearch."

Pilate, however, ſat in the ſeat of judgment, and was not ſo much concerned for the truth in general, as for ſome clue to direct him in ſo perplexing a caſe, as the trial of Jeſus Chriſt.

His teſtimony, in ſuch circumſtances, to the innocence of the Meſſiah, is truly valuable; and his ſolicitude to releaſe him, manifeſted a faint glimmering of honeſt integrity in his breaſt. But his ſcruples were ſoon o-

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vercome; and he was obliged, from intereſt or policy, to yield to the importunity of the cruel and malicious Jews.

But, waving the diſcuſſion of this ſubject, it is propoſed to conſider the two meanings put upon Pilate's queſtion; to ſhew that all men "are born and come into "the world to bear witneſs unto the truth;" and to lay down the rules for its acquiſition.

It is not uncommon for light and worldly minds to aſk Pilate's queſtion, "what is truth?" Having not been habituated to ſerious and attentive reflection, and noticing the diverſified opinions even of the enquiring, they too haſtily conclude it to be a phantom or deluſive appearance evading the ſearch.

They, whoſe hearts are ſet upon pleaſure, are averſe to the trouble of ſeeking for truth, and have not firmneſs of mind enough for what they deem ſo arduous and painful an inquiry.

Such as eſtimate every thing by its worldly profit or loſs, are little diſpoſed for a purſuit, which, as they imagine, will not add to their wealth, but rob them of their treaſure, or take away from them an opportunity of acquiring more. All theſe aſk in a jeering manner, "what is truth?" and, from the little ſucceſs attending their ſuperficial inquiries, are too ready to affirm, that it is of little worth, and to ſay, "what is truth *to us?*"

Yet it is natural and reaſonable to put theſe queſtions; and when they are put by ſerious and honeſt minds, they are entitled to diligent conſideration; and demand a plain and explicit anſwer.

What, then, is TRUTH?

Generally ſpeaking, it is a conformity between the nature of things and the ideas of the mind.

If the children of men had not a capacity to judge between what is true and what is falſe, it would not indeed be to any purpoſe to aſk, "what is truth?" But as long as it is allowed that their ſenſes give faithful repreſentations of objects, ſo long it muſt be admitted that they may arrive at a degree of certainty in their notions.

They naturally prefer ſome thing to others; and, from what they ſee and hear, they may draw rational and probable concluſions.

For inſtance, there cannot be any doubt, whether twice two be or be not four; nor whether things which are equal to the ſame thing, be or be not equal to one another. Upon ſuch plain and undeniable principles, however, the great truths of ſcience are founded. The wiſe have riſen from theſe ſimple and unqueſtionable aſſertions, to thoſe heights of wiſdom and knowledge, which are ſo juſtly valued and admired.

But, in general, truth reſts upon experience and obſervation. Hence, little dependence can be placed on thoſe theories and ſpeculations, which have not had facts for their baſis. Almoſt every thing, however, reſts upon probability alone. None but perfect beings can attain to abſolute and univerſal certainty. Is, then, probability unworthy of truſt; or are mankind materially deceived by acting continually upon it? Whatever dependence they may reaſonably place upon it, the ſame degree of aſſurance they may have of

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arriving at truth. Upon this preſumption the whole buſineſs of human life is founded, ſo that mankind are either totally deluded, or there is ſuch a thing as truth, which they may attain. The inquiring indeed may not ever be at a ſtand in their reſearches, or ever arrive at a point which they cannot paſs. Nothing more can be meant by the perfectibility of human nature, than that none can ſay how much they are capable of improvement; or fix a place, beyond which it is not poſſible to proceed. The children of men are then capable of attaining the truth; which uſually ariſes from the attentive conſideration of what is probable or likely, and is eſtabliſhed upon experiment and fact.

If any be deſirous to know what is the truth in any particular kinds of knowledge, they muſt direct themſelves by thoſe general principles which lead to certainty in the common affairs of life. Do any wiſh, for inſtance, to become acquainted with moral and religious truths, they muſt procure all the information in their power, before they can decide which is the moſt probable and certain. Surely all will allow it to be a moral truth, that what promotes their greateſt happineſs in the end, it is their intereſt and their duty to perform.

Some have maintained truth to be the teſt of virtue itſelf; as if all who did wrong were guilty of deceit. In one ſenſe they are. They at leaſt deceive themſelves, and miſtake their true intereſt. The beſt notion of virtue then is, that it is moſt productive of laſting and ſolid happineſs.

Truth is a branch of virtue, but nothing more. Thus applied, it takes the name of Sincerity, and will be entitled to conſideration in the ſequel.

Whilſt there are ſo many diſputes among mankind on the ſubject of religion, ſome may think it unlikely that the truth ſhould ever be attained, and of little conſequence whether it be or not. If, however, any credit be due to philoſophy and the experience of mankind, all effects muſt have adequate cauſes, comprehending themſelves and their works. Hence, if we conſider the appearances and tendencies of nature, reaſon will conduct us to a wiſe, powerful, and good Being, the creator of all things. What degree of reflection is neceſſary for the diſcovery of this truth, or whether it was in fact the offspring of divine revelation, might form uſeful ſubjects for human enquiry. When made known, it approves itſelf to the natural reaſon of mankind, who would be loſt in unfathomable difficulties without the ſuppoſition of an intelligent univerſal cauſe.

Like obſervations may be applied to the doctrine of a future ſtate. If the children of men be but for ſolid and good reaſons perſuaded of its truth, it may ſeem rather immaterial to ſome from what origin the knowledge of it ſprang. I myſelf aſcribe it at once to divine revelation; but there are various preſumptions in its favour, which have great weight with inquiring perſons, and incline them to admit the doctrine as laid down in the Goſpel, and confirmed by the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt. The evidence for ſuch an extraordinary occurrence ſhould be examined like that of any hiſtorical circumſtance whatever; and determined

termined by thoſe rules, which direct mankind to allow or reject the teſtimony of one another.

It is my duty to declare, that I do not claim the aſſent of the enquiring to any other religious principles than thoſe which have been detailed. In this ſenſe, therefore, I have endeavoured to point out the queſtion, "what is truth?" and have been inſenſibly, though incidentally, led to point out the method by which it may be acquired. Can it then be reaſonably aſked, what is ſuch truth to the children of men? It is every thing. Nothing can be more valuable or precious. Nothing can better lead them to a righteous courſe of conduct, than the influence of the divine example, and the hope of a favourable acceptance with their heavenly father.

It yet remains to point out the meaning and advantages of ſincerity. Men cannot always ſpeak the truth, becauſe they do not always know it. They may ſpeak error, believing it to be truth. They ſhould indeed be cautious of ſpreading what is uncertain; but they never ought to ſpeak what they know to be untrue. Sincerity, then, is the conformity of the expreſſions and behaviour with the thoughts and ſentiments of the heart. It is founded on innocence and ſimplicity, and is totally averſe to any kind of deceit. How little of it is found in the world! They are deemed ignorant, and deſpiſed as unexperienced, who are unpractiſed in the arts of fraud.—How often do men utter ſentiments different from the thoughts of their hearts!

In ſocial and in civil life, among the different profeſſions

feſſions and employments of mankind, from the cottage to the court, duplicity and diſſimulation are found greatly prevalent and abounding. In vain do any expect even thoſe, who ſeem retired from the more public haunts of men, to be free from the influence of this general contagion. The diſorder has ſpread ſo widely, that, doubtleſs, many think the buſineſs of mankind could not go on without it. Sages themſelves have profeſſed to vindicate the propriety of diſſembling; and the children of mirth and wit have ever been ready to acknowledge, that were they ſtrictly to adhere to truth, their talents would be entirely loſt, and they would not any longer be able to ſet the table in a roar.

To ſuch an extent has the evil ſpread, that ſometimes the friends of truth really know not on what or whom to depend; all reports are regarded as almoſt equally fallacious, and common fame has been branded as a common liar.

When once a departure is made from truth and duty, it is without doubt difficult to draw the line, beyond which none ſhould proceed. In one inſtance deceit may ſeem advantageous, but it may not be in the next; and it muſt be pernicious and uſeleſs, whenever it is in the leaſt ſuſpected.

Though there be not in fact any deception, yet the mind is corrupted by an intended deviation from truth, and prepared to diſregard it for the ſake of pleaſure or intereſt. I forbear particulars: There would be no end in detailing them. Mankind allow themſelves in thouſands of practices inconſiſtent with ſincerity and truth.

truth. What vain compliments, what empty, unmeaning, and falſe phraſes do they uſe!

Theſe may be diſmiſſed with the obſervation, that, as they are of little ſignification, they are of no value, and ſhould be dropped by thoſe who have any regard for the ſimplicity of truth.

In the commerce of mankind, Sincerity takes the name of Faithfulneſs. Without doubt there would be an end to the whole intercourſe of ſociety, if the children of men could not in general depend upon one another. Hence they are taught to be faithful to their engagements, promiſes, and oaths. If this be morality, they ſhould be careful not to enter into any engagements, not to make any promiſes, not to take any oaths, inconſiſtent with juſtice and virtue. Though they have promiſed or ſworn to do wrong, they aggravate their guilt by the performance. Herod committed a grievous error, when he promiſed with an oath to give the daughter of Herodias whatever ſhe demanded; but his wickedneſs was ſtill greater when he ſent for the head of John the Baptiſt. He would undoubtedly have been juſtified in refuſing the requeſt. Where duty is clearly ſeen, oaths and promiſes can only bind to the performance. Even in matters of apparent indifference, if any make unconditional engagements, they diſappoint and deceive others, they prepare themſelves for deception, and ſet an example for the leſs ſcrupulous to exceed.

Much is ſaid in favour of ſecrecy, without conſidering whether what is entruſted be for the benefit of mankind to be told.

I do not ſee how good perſons can be eagerly deſirous to be acquainted with ſecrets. If error and vice had never been concealed, they would not have obtained ſo wide a ſpread. Expoſe them, and their votaries are aſhamed. Expoſe them, and they vaniſh away.

Where then, it may be aſked, is the confidence of friendſhip? but I anſwer, how can there be friendſhip without virtue? and is it not virtuous to make friendſhip itſelf give way to the general good? Poſſibly in ſome inſtances it may not be right not to tell whatever is known; but in all caſes the children of men ſhould try their conduct by the great rule of juſtice, and by the proſpect of promoting the utmoſt degree of felicity. It becomes them to do their duty, whether they be bound to it or not. Nothing, it is obvious, can bind them to what is wrong. But, it may be aſked, who ſhall judge concerning wrong and right? What, ſhould not the greateſt happineſs be the ſcope of men's endeavours; and have not chriſtians reaſon and the word of God to direct them in the purſuit? It is the duty of all to inform their minds and to enlighten their conſciences; but, after all, private judgment muſt be their guide. This is the divinity which dwells within them; the repreſentative of God in their minds. The power of force cannot ſubdue it. It will not yield, but to reaſon and perſuaſion.

It is the duty of mankind to preſerve it pure and inviolate; and to ſupply it with all neceſſary and uſeful information. In the day of trial it will ſtand the friend of ſuch as poſſeſs it, and will keep them unſpotted by the world.

Theſe friends of truth, theſe conſcientious and upright characters, will not accommodate or conceal their notions, nor gloſs and varniſh them over with a fair ſhew of words capable of different meanings. They will not ſcruple to tell the whole truth: they will not ſhun to declare the whole will of God. If any keep back a part, which they apprehend may prove painful or offenſive, it will ſoon be ſeen, that they have had recourſe to unfair methods in the cauſe of truth, and the whole hoſt of errors, prejudices and ſuperſtitions, will be raiſed, before reaſon can come with its full force to the attack.

Such ſhort-ſighted creatures, as the children of men, ſhould not do evil, that good may come. Duty is clear, and the conſequences are in the power of a Being, who has appointed all things for the beſt, and decreed that all things ſhall work together for the good of thoſe who love God and keep his commandments. Knowledge is power; and there is a native majeſty, an internal ſtrength, a winning force of perſuaſion, in the ſimplicity of truth, which nothing can effectually reſiſt or overcome. Check it, and it ſprings up again. Reſtrain it, and it breaks forth anew. Strike it, and it ſhines the more. Oppreſs it, and it riſes indignant. Like the patient camomile, the more it is trampled upon, the more it flouriſhes. It is of God, and cannot be overthrown. To adopt a popular play upon words, the force of argument muſt overcome the argument of force.

They, who laugh and ſneer at the prejudices of mankind, irritate much more than they who uniform-

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ly and ſeriouſly oppoſe them without any diſguiſe or concealment. Nay, when any part of the truth is thought to be hidden, ſome mean and intereſted motive is often ſuſpected. Some may fancy, that they are laying the foundation for future enquiries, by a partial diſplay of the principles of reaſon; but they are not aware how their notions and arguments may be perverted to the moſt dangerous and violent purpoſes. The ſeeds of the French revolution were ſown, it is ſaid, by philoſophers under the monarchical ſyſtem, which ſo fettered their enquiries, that they uſed ridicule as the teſt of truth, called in the aid of irony, or feebly drew ſome of the out-lines of reaſon, in expectation that poſterity would fill them up. Impartial hiſtory, at a more diſtant period, may deſcribe the conſequences. A flood of light hath indeed been poured upon the European world; in many countries men's minds have undergone a total revolution; but the former too cautious mode of propagating truth, combining with its later ſudden burſt, among thoſe, who have been rather dazzled with its ſplendor, than enlightened and cheared with its rays, has alarmed the ignorant, and ranged the prejudiced and narrow-minded in martial array againſt principles, which had ſo long been kept ſecret by the children of philoſophical enquiry.

Like errors have been committed in England by thoſe who call themſelves Diſſenters, when, inconſiſtently with their principles, they have attempted to act as a body in the ſtate. As they chanced to be ſeeking the repeal of the Teſt laws at the time when the French revolution was proceeding, the clamor was ſoon raiſed,

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that they were aiming at the overthrow of what is called the Britiſh conſtitution, for the ſake of procuring power to themſelves. It is well known how ſolicitous they have ſince been, and with what little ſucceſs, to ſhow how well they are affected to the government. Some were ſimple enough to declare, that, if they could but obtain the repeal of the Teſt laws, they would never aſk for any thing more. How ridiculous it was for them thus to attempt to fetter their own inquiries, and to check their own exertions!

They began at the wrong end, and proceeded in a wrong way. Their error, it muſt be owned, was mine too. Time and perſuaſion ſerve the cauſe of truth far more effectually than aſſociations. The Diſſenters are ever talking againſt the doctrines and forms of particular eſtabliſhed churches. Had they uniformly objected to the principle of eſtabliſhments, as corrupting and defeating the good ends of religion, their ſucceſs, in their individual capacities, for what they apprehend the cauſe of truth, would have been greater. The rancour of doctrinal diſputes would have died away. Sects and parties would have been loſt in the ſearch for truth. Were temporal intereſt out of the queſtion, all would agree to differ. Certainly the kingdom of Chriſt is not of this world; and time will be, when it ſhall become the common cry of rejoicing, "Babylon, "ſpiritual Babylon, is fallen, is fallen!" Theſe inſtances are adduced, to ſhew the impropriety of a partial diſplay of truth.

There is, perhaps, much room for diſcuſſion upon the ſubject. I appeal to honeſt and reflecting minds.

Many are, indeed, very averſe to tell painful truths; but they ſhould recollect, how eager the officious and the talkative are to ſpread them. Thus, as in many other inſtances, thoſe decline the office, who are beſt qualified for the execution. The wiſe and good ſhould really be more zealous in the cauſe of truth. Otherwiſe they reſt its whole defence on thoſe who are leaſt fitted for the work; on the angry, the clamorous, the prejudiced, and the wicked. What, though temporal inconveniences ſhould attend the plain and total declaration of the ſentiments of the enquiring, they do their duty; their minds muſt be happy and at eaſe; the virtuous will encourage them; God will approve them; the world will amend; and the truth will prevail. If theſe bleſſings be not ſufficient, let them be contraſted with the evils ariſing from an oppoſite conduct; from guile, deceit, and treachery. If it be conſidered how confidence is deſtroyed, and the pleaſure of ſocial intercourſe is rooted up, by the practice of inſincerity, how the artful and the diſhoneſt are often ſnared in their own devices, ſurely reflecting minds will conclude, that honeſty is the beſt policy; that integrity is a moſt valuable treaſure; and that nothing ſo much becomes the friends of truth, as a free and ingenuous temper.

Even the frank acknowledgment of *faults* will be well received by the wiſe and good. Hence, perſons may be led to deal honeſtly and fairly with themſelves, and to amend all thoſe diſpoſitions which are contrary to reaſon and virtue. No kind of knowledge can be ſo truly beneficial to the children of men, as the know-

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ledge of themſelves, and the true ſtate of their condition and expectations. Hence, they ſhould learn to beware of that worſt kind of diſſimulation, which goes by the name of Hypocriſy. Who does not ſee the wicked abſurdity of pretending to conceal themſelves from the knowledge of the moſt high God, of a Being univerſally and always preſent, who ſees effects in their cauſes, to whom the moſt diſtant futurity is preſent, and thoſe things, which are to be, ſeem as if they were.

Such is the extenſive nature and uſefulneſs of truth, in a ſpeculative, moral, and religious view. It comprehends all valuable knowledge; and requires the utmoſt, pureſt, ſincerity, in heart and life. It improves and enlarges the minds of the children of men: it teaches them to ſcorn duplicity and meanneſs: it raiſes its friends above the world: it gains them the goodwill of the worthy: and will finally entitle them to the approbation of their heavenly Father; to the bleſſedneſs of that future ſtate, which has been revealed in the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt. Hence, great rewards are promiſed to faith; which, being founded on good principles and careful enquiry, cemented with integrity, and adorned with the pureſt ſincerity, is indeed the beſt and nobleſt diſpoſition of the human mind; a diſtinguiſhed honor in times of danger and temptation; a virtue of apoſtolic growth, yet fit to be cultivated in every age; and the beſt pledge for the felicity of the heavenly world. As the excellence of a plant is determined by the ſoundneſs of its root, ſo the motives and intentions of the heart characterize the actions of mankind.

But ſurely truth and ſincerity preſent the beſt and nobleſt motives for the growing improvement of the diſpoſitions and behaviour.

Where, then, are they, who did not "come into the "world to bear witneſs unto the truth?"

But how muſt truth be obtained? In general, deliverance muſt be ſought from every falſe bias, from every unworthy prejudice, from whatever is inconſiſtent with reaſon, and from whatever would lead mankind aſtray from the general good.

But prejudice is ſo mortal an enemy to truth, that it demands a more ſerious attack, and a more particular conſideration of its nature, evil, and cure. Thus, perhaps, will be furniſhed the beſt rules for the attainment of truth.

Such is the intention, ſuch the ſubject, of the following diſcourſe, which forms a natural ſequel to the preſent.

As a proper cloſe of this, be it obſerved, that, if chriſtians apply for information to the everlaſting Goſpel, and pray for the aſſiſtance of the God of ſincerity and truth, they will not, probably, be long in being bleſſed with all the moral advantages of ſuch a treaſure. Whilſt they live, they will be uſeful; and when they die, they will be filled with the joyful hope of everlaſting happineſs.

II.

ON THE NATURE AND EVILS OF PREJUDICE.

THERE are ſeveral paſſages in the Goſpel, which place the force of prejudice in a ſtriking point of view. When Jeſus Chriſt aſtoniſhed his countrymen with his inſtructions, ſo as to lead them to enquire, "Whence has this man this wiſdom and theſe mighty works?" the voice of envy anſwered, "Is not this the "carpenter's ſon." Matthew xiii. 15.

In the ſame manner, when the officers of the chief prieſts and phariſees, who were ſent to watch and ſeize the Meſſiah, came back to their employers, and alledged as a reaſon for their not executing their commiſſion, "Never man ſpake like this man," theſe haughty men replied, Have ye alſo been deceived? "Have "any of the rulers or of the phariſees believed on "him? But the multitude, who know not the law, "are curſed." John vii. 46. 49.

In all ages and nations it has been too common to put like queſtions, and to draw a like concluſion. "What do the great think of theſe matters? 'Tis "pity, that the pearl of knowledge ſhould be trodden "under the hoof of the ſwiniſh multitude." Such is the language of thoſe who would keep mankind in ignorance, barbariſm, and ſlavery.

When the cautious, timid, and worldly Nicodemus, ſo far influenced by the love of truth, inquired, whether the Jewiſh law condemned any before their con-

duct and actions were examined? the prejudiced aſſembly exclaimed, "Doſt thou too come out of Gali-"lee? Search and ſee, for no prophet hath ever riſen "out of Galilee." v. 50. 53.

Some have ſuppoſed that, after this declaration, the aſſembly broke up in a tumultuous manner. It was a declaration, which flew in the face of truth. For Jonah and Nahum were of Galilee. Thus, an unexamined aſſertion, though falſe, is often uſed to ſupport the cauſe of error and ſuperſtition.

I know not, however, a ſtronger or more ſtriking inſtance of the force of prejudice, than that which is ſhewn in the account of Nathaniel, at the end of the firſt chapter of the Goſpel of John. To his character, Jeſus Chriſt bore a moſt excellent teſtimony, when he declared him to be "an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there was no guile." From his hiſtory, however, it ſeems, as if ſincerity itſelf could not altogether preſerve the children of men from the power of prejudice. The friends of truth may be honeſt, yet if they be too indolent to enquire, their minds may be biaſſed by prepoſſeſſions, which are not founded on reaſon or on facts. Thus, when Philip invited Nathaniel to come and ſee Jeſus, who, he ſaid, anſwered to the character given of the Meſſiah by Moſes and the prophets, even the guileleſs Iſraelite was ſo prejudiced as to aſk, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and ſee," replied the meek and ingenuous Philip. He was not angry with his honeſt friend for being ſwayed by a prejudice, from which perhaps he himſelf was but juſt delivered.

He

He only wiſhed and invited him to examine, and judge for himſelf.

Let juſtice be done to the character of Nathaniel. Though under an undue bias, he was ſo far open to conviction, as to comply with the invitation of Philip. He went to ſee Jeſus, and was, from certain circumſtances, which the hiſtory does not fully explain, ſo perſuaded that he was the Meſſiah, that all his prejudices vaniſhed away, and he declared him to be the Son of God, and the King of Iſrael.

Theſe inſtances from the ſcriptures may perhaps open the nature and force of prejudice, ſhow its inconveniencies, diſadvantages, and evils, and point out the mode and rules for its cure. In vain, as it has appeared, may any perſons be perſuaded of the nature and excellence of truth, if they be under the influence of any wrong bias, of any unreaſonable prepoſſeſſion. If they be under the dominion of prejudice, they may go on in error for ever.

What, then, is prejudice?

A prejudice is a judgment formed before examination, without examination, from indolence, haſte, or paſſion, with careleſſneſs, or after a very ſuperficial and partial enquiry, againſt, or in favour of, perſons or things, ſtudies, purſuits, employments, ſpeculations, or principles.

They, who would judge, ſhould compare; and they, who compare, ſhould be well acquainted with the objects of compariſon. The grand remedy, then, for the diſorder of prejudice, is examination.—People muſt "go and ſee."

In

In the ſequel it is propoſed to examine ſome of the ſtriking pictures of prejudice in general; and of ſome prejudices in particular.

If a prejudice be entertained againſt perſons, nothing, which they can ſay or do, will ſeem right to thoſe, who are diſpoſed to think evil of them. Their faces are thought the deceitful coverings of bad hearts, and the beſt of their words or actions may of courſe be aſcribed to mean deſigns and unworthy motives. On the other hand, they who are prejudiced in favour of others, are unwilling to find any fault with them, and are ready on all occaſions to vindicate the folly, or even wickedneſs, of their conduct.

Theſe prejudices are ſtrikingly exemplified in the behaviour of ſuch as unite themſelves with any particular party. The advocates for contrary opinions can do nothing right, and their own friends can do nothing wrong in their eyes.

They, who are prejudiced againſt places, will be diſpoſed to ſay with Nathaniel, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? yet there Jeſus Chriſt prepared his mind for the events of his future life, and laid the foundation of that Goſpel, which is fitted to promote the everlaſting happineſs of all the children of men. What have places to do with greatneſs of ability, with excellence of character?

> Full many a gem of pureſt ray ſerene
> The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
> Full many a flow'r is born to bluſh unſeen,
> And waſte its ſweetneſs on the deſert air.
>
> GRAY'S ELEGY.

The

The children of men are indeed for the moſt part the creatures of the circumſtances in which they are placed; but few are found deſtitute of a capacity for information and improvement.

In the remoteſt haunts, in the rudeſt, moſt uncultivated, and deſolate ſpots, the faculties of human nature are called into exertion. In the moſt retired hamlets are found many a rural genius, the oracles and artiſts of the place, who are encouraged to exerciſe thoſe powers of body and mind, which contribute to the general comfort, welfare, and happineſs.

They, who think no place or country equal to their native ſoil, would do well to ſtay there; for, if they travel, they draw upon themſelves the laughter and contempt of the world. Surely Britons are riſing ſuperior to this prejudice, which has juſtly drawn upon them the ridicule of Europe; and are beginning to learn, that arts, knowledge, and liberty, may flouriſh on continental ground.

How common is it for mankind to deſpiſe one another's ſtudies, employments, and purſuits! Without queſtion, it is a noble office to ſuperintend and direct the cultivation and improvement of the mind and heart; to train up children in the way which is good; to teach the young idea how to ſhoot; to diſtribute mental, moral, and religious information; to lay down the duties of human nature; and to prepare the children of men for glory, honour, and immortality. By the cuſtoms of the world, this office may be monopolized by a certain claſs; but it is obviouſly incumbent on parents and heads of families to provide ſuch an education for

their

their children and domeſtics, as may render them uſeful now, and bleſſed for ever. Surely all who underſtand religion have authority to teach it. In whatever ſtation, employment, or profeſſion, provided it be innocent, every rational being may and ought to make known the goodneſs of God, the duties and expectations of the children of men, or at leaſt, may and ought ſo to exemplify the beauty and excellence of virtue, as to induce others to purſue the ſame track, which, if revelation be true, will end in everlaſting happineſs. Any may be pious and good, in the field or in the city.

The ſhepherds of the plains may bleſs God for his goodneſs, and uſe their utmoſt endeavours to deſerve the heavenly kindneſs, by a faithful diſcharge of all thoſe duties which religion demands. The meaneſt artiſts are ſuſceptible of religious gratitude, and may feel the pleaſure and reap the benefit of devotion in the very midſt of their employments. Whatever occupation miniſters to the real happineſs and improvement of the mind, may ſurely be followed with innocence and virtue, and contribute to prepare the mind for rendering itſelf acceptable to God for everlaſting ages.

That there are employments, which are not conſiſtent either with honeſty or juſtice, may be allowed, and is ſufficiently evident. Theſe ſhould be declined from principle; but no prejudice ſhould be entertained againſt any. It is well when perſons are fond of their own buſineſs, and engage in it with that ſteady perſeverance, which is likely to inſure ſucceſs. But the well-diſpoſed ſhould beware of entertaining any ſuch over-weening opinion of their own abilities or manner

of

of life, as may prevent them from doing juſtice to others, or lead them to lay any thing in the way of their duty, or of their own.

They, who are prejudiced againſt perſons and offices, gradually form an undue bias againſt their ſpeculations and principles; and in favour of their own. Thus, they do the greateſt injury to themſelves, and place obſtacles in the way of truth. They, who are neither wiſe nor good, may poſſibly, though not with equal advantage, lay down the principles of knowledge and virtue, though it be juſtly lamented, when any act inconſiſtently with their principles; yet this is not a ſufficient reaſon why any ſhould reject the principles themſelves.

They alſo may be led into great errors, who, from being partial to perſons, embrace their opinions, which they do not carefully examine. Inquirers after truth ſhould put themſelves on their guard, that they may not be biaſſed by any conſiderations, which are independent of reaſon and argument.

They ſhould likewiſe beware of thoſe prejudices, the reverſe of what have been mentioned, which would lead them to conceive too unfavourably of ſuch as differ, or too favourably of ſuch as agree, with them in opinion. Without doubt, truth is but one; yet few there are who find it. Who can be fully aſſured, that they are not in ſome degree intereſted or prejudiced themſelves? If the children of men be the creatures of the circumſtances in which they are placed, how do even the friends of truth know, that in certain ſituations, they themſelves ſhould not become the votaries

of

of error and ſuperſtition? Whilſt, therefore, they would willingly teach others their miſtakes, they ſhould feel that compaſſion for them, which, in their ſtate, they, themſelves, would require; and ſhould blend the ſpirit of candour and meekneſs, with that of honeſty and perſuaſion.

Such are the general features of prejudice. It obſtructs the uſefulneſs, it bars the happineſs, of thoſe who are under its influence. It leads them to form wrong and unjuſt opinions of others; and, as evil often multiplies itſelf, it leads others to form wrong and unjuſt opinions of them.

Prejudice often ſprings from conceit; and thus may bring thoſe, who are under its dominion, to that fatal ſtate, the ignorance of themſelves. Hence, they undertake that, for which they are not fitted; and will not engage in thoſe things, for which they were evidently deſigned. Prejudice makes them deaf to the voice of inſtruction, and hardens them againſt ſcenes of diſtreſs. They liſten not to thoſe, of whom they have conceived an unfavourable opinion; and thus, probably, are often the greateſt enemies of themſelves. On the other hand, they think too well of thoſe, whoſe advice may conduct them into what is evil and wrong.

Whilſt they are in this manner ſurrounded by the miſts of prejudice, the light of reaſon and truth can never pierce through the gloom. Every thing appears to them in a falſe and wrong point of view; and they run the riſk of going down to the grave with their errors and imperfections on their heads.

This is a ſad ſtate, in which ſcarcely any would allow

low themſelves to be. Seldom are circumſtances ſo very unfavourably diſpoſed. Many may have a love for truth in general, and may heartily purſue it; but ſome particular prejudices may cloud their ſight, and intercept their progreſs.

It is propoſed to examine into theſe.

Whoever form notions, which are not founded on facts and experience, or draw concluſions, without making previous neceſſary obſervations, muſt fill their minds with prejudices. In every branch of knowledge it has been too common to frame theories and ſpeculations, before all the particulars connected with the ſubject have been fairly and thoroughly examined. Hence have ariſen thoſe wild notions, which, with unthinking perſons, have brought wiſdom into diſrepute. The learned, it is certain, have their prejudices, as well as the illiterate. They, only, are truly wiſe, who apply their knowledge to practical and uſeful purpoſes; and cauſe it to miniſter to the happineſs and improvement of human life. Too long have the learned, as they have been called, amuſed or fatigued mankind with their ingenious fancies, the offspring of wild imagination, unſupported by experiments; empty as dreams, and baſeleſs as the viſions of the night. At length nothing was taken for granted, at leaſt in the world of nature, but what was founded on obſervation and experience.

It would have been well, if the ſame mode of judging had been applied to every kind of knowledge whatever. Then the children of men would not have been perplexed with thoſe endleſs ſyſtems, ſo contrary to

 reaſon,

reaſon, which check their inquiries, trammel the freedom of diſcuſſion, and enchain them to error and ſuperſtition. Reſpecting a ſtate of civil ſociety, there are, indeed, abundant prejudices; yet none are ſo pernicious as thoſe which bar innovation and improvement. But, ſeparated and inſulated as I wiſh to be from all political and religious parties, ſects and denominations whatever, I feel little intereſted about the prejudices which concern them. Every aſſociation, as far as I can judge, requires ſuch ſacrifices to be made, as to me ſeem to be inconſiſtent with integrity. Numbers cannot make truth. It is independent of votes. Reaſon alone can win over diſciples to what is right, and juſt, and good. It is a prejudice, therefore, to lean to any thing elſe. Hence, all the great duties of human life may be claſſed under one head. The friends of truth and of mankind may judge of the ſocial, and of the civil, by their tendency to the general good. Thus, they will deliver themſelves from all thoſe abſtract and litigious diſputes concerning rights and privileges, ambiguous and unmeaning terms, which portion out the children of men into ſo many tribes, ſecluded and ſeparated from one another, without any common intereſt, or any common tie. Were the wiſe and good to attend ſolely to the duties incumbent upon them; were they to conſider their ſocial and civil condition as lying entirely within the regulation of morality; were all men to direct the whole of their conduct by a regard to the general good, as involving their own particular happineſs; and, above all, were they to reſolve, that they would hearken only to the

voice

voice of reaſon, and yield to nothing but the power of perſuaſion, a remedy would ſoon be provided for all the evils in the world.

The day may be diſtant, and it may be thought difficult for individuals to ſtem the vaſt and rapid torrent of errors, which pours like a deluge upon the civil condition of man; but, if truth be irreſiſtible, there is every poſſible encouragement. The ſmalleſt pebble ſtirs the lake. No good effort is loſt, and all things will and muſt work together for univerſal and everlaſting good.

If application had never been made to any other interference than the force of reaſon, truth would have been far more prevalent; but men have called in temporal power to ſupport their want of argument, and have not been willing to depend upon perſuaſion alone. God knows, what duplicity has been uſed to lead perſons farther than they would otherwiſe have been diſpoſed to go; and the iſſue has uſually been, that their prejudices have been alarmed, and they have returned to the fortreſs of error and ſuperſtition. Mankind are not to be deluded, even into truth and juſtice. Evil muſt not be done, that good may come.

Moſt of the moral prejudices of mankind ariſe from an inattention to their true intereſt, from not looking to the final iſſues of things, and from not reflecting with proper comprehenſion of mind, that their happineſs and their duty are one and the ſame.

But it is not private, perſonal, temporal utility alone, to which mankind ſhould appeal for the regulation of their conduct. Virtue is indeed happineſs, but of its

own peculiar kind. It gives health to the body, peace to the mind. It is attended with the approbation, eſteem, and affection of the wiſe and good. It ſpreads the influence of worthy example, and affects the welfare of ſociety. Finally, if revelation be true, goodneſs hath "the promiſe, not only of the preſent life, "but of that which is to come."

But, of all prejudices, none are ſo numerous and pernicious, as thoſe which concern the ſubject of religion. If the beſt things be capable of the worſt abuſe, they, who pretend to judge in any important buſineſs before examination, and without examination, with haſte or paſſion, in a light, partial, or ſuperficial manner, muſt expect to fall into the greateſt errors. They, who go againſt thoſe common principles, which are agreeable to reaſon and truth, are moſt aſſuredly under the influence of prejudice, and muſt ſoon become the children of ſuperſtition.

Were any, for inſtance, to deny the being of a God, they would preſently be loſt in difficulties not to be fathomed. They could not account for themſelves, for their ſenſes, or for any of the objects of their ſenſes. As the deſign and end of every thing ſeem to be good, it is reaſonable to truſt in the benevolence of God, a principle founded on juſtice, or on a regard to the general welfare of the creation. Can any religious notions be true, which are inconſiſtent with theſe? or are there any doctrines in the Goſpel, which cannot be reconciled with the proper unity and perfect goodneſs of God?

As I believe ſuch principles and doctrines to be

founded on prejudice, I have never failed uſing my endeavours to ſhow, that they are fallacious and groundleſs; but I would not depart from the ſpirit of candid inquiry, which ſhould keep me always open to conviction, and lead me merely to ſay, if I be wrong, I wiſh only to be better informed; if I be right, think with me.

The proper cure for prejudice is examination. Nothing can be true, which is contrary to experience and facts. In doubtful caſes, inquirers ſhould examine both ſides of the queſtion, and uſe their moſt ſtrenuous endeavours to keep their minds even and unbiaſſed, till they have fairly and thoroughly examined. Whilſt they are upon the ſearch for truth, they ſhould remain ſuperior to every paſſionate emotion, and never ſuffer anger, envy, bigotry, or any other unworthy or wrong feeling, to cloud their underſtanding and ſtop their inquiry.

They, who are prejudiced againſt perſons from their looks, words, or actions, ſhould conſider, that little dependence can be placed upon the knowledge gained of the character from the countenance, that the meaning of words may be miſtaken, and that, in ſhort, nothing but long obſervation of the general demeanour, can make one man properly acquainted with the motives and intentions of another's heart.

By noticing the errors of others, the wiſe correct their own.

Hence, they ſhould beware of entertaining notions, contrary to thoſe general principles, which appear to be ſo firmly eſtabliſhed, and ſo thoroughly approved. They are as much prejudiced, who will not receive

what is founded on reaſon, as they, who credulouſly ſwallow what is contrary to it.

If, then, perſons be well diſpoſed and hearty, ſincere and diligent, in the ſearch for truth; if they examine every thing by its conformity with reaſon, and its tendency to the greateſt good; if they be well acquainted with their own minds, and beg their heavenly Father to diſpel their errors; they may expect to be in ſome degree delivered from thoſe prejudices, which cauſe ſo many evils and miſtakes among the children of men. Whenever any prejudice is riſing like a miſt upon them, whenever they feel inclined to paſs a judgment before, and without, examination, with haſte or paſſion, after a partial ſurvey, againſt, or in favour of, perſons, places, employments, or principles, let them remember the advice of Philip, "Come and ſee."

Let them examine all things, and hold faſt that which is good.

Thus, they will be prepared to act with ſincerity in all the events, and under all the circumſtances, of human life. Thus, they will gradually become fitted for that future bleſſed ſtate, in which every prejudice will be ſcattered, and the light of truth will ſhine for evermore.

III.

THE OBLIGATION OF SINCERITY IN DECLARING THE TRUTH.

"THE lip of truth," ſays Solomon, "is eſta-
"bliſhed for ever, but a lying tongue is but
"for a moment." Prov. xii. 19.

Surely this obſervation is juſt. Surely a ſtrict regard to truth is neceſſary in the commerce of mankind. They who addict themſelves to falſehood ſoon forfeit influence, reputation, credit, and character. Neither ſincerity nor honeſty is any longer allowed them.

Some have pleaſed themſelves with ſtating certain caſes in which it is not only allowable to deviate from truth, but in which it would be wrong to adhere to it. —Human duty certainly conſiſts in promoting the greateſt good upon the whole. If, then, it can be ſhewn that, in any inſtance, a departure from truth will, *in its remoteſt conſequences*, effect a greater increaſe of the general happineſs, than the moſt rigid obſervance of its laws, it cannot but be admitted that ſuch a departure is not unlawful.

But many caſes have been put which are not likely to happen; and even theſe caſes have been partially conſidered by thoſe who have argued that the obligations of truth are not univerſal. There are, it may be, ſome few inſtances, in which it may ſeem difficult for perſons to determine how they ſhould act. Theſe inſtances call for their moſt diligent and impartial attention.

tention. Whenever they are in doubt, they ſhould not make a haſty examination. All their diſcretion muſt be uſed, and all their honeſty muſt be exerciſed. Gentle minds may be tempted to decline telling painful truths; but the wiſe and good ſhould be careful how they leave this diſagreeable office to the talkative and the ſimple.

A regard to expediency and policy leads further than may at firſt be imagined. They tend to make men ſelfiſh and worldly, and render them timid and irreſolute in the cauſe of truth and duty. If they do not lead *them* into error, they may have a pernicious effect upon others; eſpecially upon thoſe who are not ſufficiently given to reflection, or whoſe prevailing motive is private intereſt.

Whenever, therefore, any one is tempted to diſguiſe the truth, he ſhould at leaſt conſider firſt the neceſſity of the caſe; he ſhould weigh all the probable and real advantages; he ſhould reflect on the influence of his example; and, above all, he ſhould remember how much he may weaken in himſelf a regard and love for truth, by a departure from it on any the moſt trifling occaſion.

Veracity and ſincerity are not only neceſſary but uſeful in ſociety. They unite the children of men to one another in bonds of the cloſeſt and moſt endearing fellowſhip. They who depend upon others, ſhould give others reaſon to depend upon them. They who deceive, can expect only to be deceived. A fair and upright behaviour ſecures the eſteem even of thoſe who are not diſtinguiſhed for it. In the commerce of the world

world nothing is ſo ſerviceable as that ſterling honeſty which ſcorns all mean deceit, all low cunning, all paltry equivocation, and every tendency to diſſemble.

Many plead in favour of telling the truth by halves; as if it were juſt to delude mankind into what is right, and to take up the arms of error in the cauſe of integrity.

But if the truth be only partially told, it is too often as open to objections as if it were error; and the whole hoſt of prejudices become united, before truth can come with any advantage to the attack. And were it indeed adviſeable never to give offence, are not the children of error and ſuperſtition in general much ſooner rouſed to indignation by hints againſt their actions, than by an honeſt declaration and defence of the truth? Is not, at leaſt, an advantage given them to miſrepreſent the truth, and to calumniate its injudicious friends? Is not this advantage frequently embraced with eagerneſs, and puſhed to its utmoſt extent.

Bacon has well obſerved, that "knowledge is "power;" and it may be added, that the influence of reaſon is ſo ſtrong that nothing can bear it down. Its progreſs may be ſlow, but it is effectual. If twenty perſons were but to tell the whole truth to-day, and to accompany it with its proper arguments, thouſands might believe it to-morrow.

Is it not the duty of chriſtians to obſerve the directions of Jeſus, "What I tell you in darkneſs, ſpeak "ye in light: what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon "the houſe-tops."

There

There may, however, be a time to keep ſilence; which the wiſe will not fail to diſcover and obſerve. Sometimes a regard to truth itſelf may lead its friends not to declare their opinions. If perſons be not diſpoſed or likely to conſider, it is vain to think of compelling them. If it be not probable they will be convinced, wherefore ſhould any labour to convince them? Nay, is that not danger of riveting them in error, by oppoſing thoſe prejudices which cling to them as the ivy clings to the oak?

There is, however, an infallible rule, if men will only apply it. The general good, fairly and thoroughly conſidered, will unerringly determine them. On ſubjects of importance, therefore, it is unqueſtionably their duty not merely to profeſs what they believe, but to ſupport their faith by the moſt convincing arguments they can collect. What though the friends of truth do ſubject themſelves to inconveniences,—what though the unthinking reproach them,—what though the worſt of worldly evils fall upon them,—are they not in the way of their duty? and have not many of the greateſt and beſt characters whom the world ever ſaw preceded them in the ſame path?

Would the children of men never deſert "the 'van-"tage ground of reaſon," truth would be found and acknowledged.—It is manifeſt that thoſe teachers, at leaſt, are not to be juſtified, who conceal from their pupils any thing of what they come to learn. All perſons, indeed, ſpeak their ſentiments upon the works and appearances of nature, without moleſtation, hindrance, or reſerve. But when religion, or ſome other

ſubjects,

ſubjects, which concern the happineſs of human life, come under conſideration, the friends of mankind are informed how uſeful it is to conceal their opinions; and not only to conceal, but to deceive, by uſing language which conveys one idea to the wiſe, and another to the vulgar. It is our duty to diſcuſs every ſubject which may miniſter to the comfort and improvement of mankind. How abſurd, then, conſidered in this light, are the common rules of faſhionable converſation! We debar ourſelves from every intereſting ſubject through a falſe fear of diſputation; and the conſequence is, that every diſpute, when it happens to occur, becomes, what is apprehended, a kind of tempeſt in the intellectual world. Were all to ſpeak what they believe to be the whole truth, theſe angry debates would ſeldom occur: The friends of truth would be better informed; each would be conſcious of his own benevolent intentions, and would be ready to impute like motives to others.

Surely they are much deceived who imagine it of little conſequence what ſentiments are entertained of God and religion. One ſingle truth may in itſelf ſeem of ſmall moment; but if it be traced through all its connections and effects, it will probably be ſeen that it continually riſes and increaſes in value. Beſides, in the endleſs diverſity of opinions, Truth can be but one; and they may be long in arriving at the end of their journey, who do not take the beſt and ſhorteſt path. By not honeſtly advancing and maintaining their opinions, they may obſtruct the progreſs of religious knowledge, and be acceſſary to that criminal

nal indifference, which not unfrequently goes under the ſpecious name of moderation and liberality. If any be known to diſſemble, (and who can long keep it unknown?) they will experience all thoſe inconveniences which attend a diſregard to truth. They will be unhappy in their own minds: They muſt be continually upon their guard leſt they be diſcovered: They will loſe the eſteem of the wiſe, virtuous, and diſcerning; and will have no juſt pretenſions to worth and conſiſtency of character.

They ſhould not, however, be ſo ſolicitous to make known what opinions they have embraced, as for what reaſons they have embraced them.

The holy ſcriptures direct chriſtians not to conceal any part of the counſel of God; and the holy ſcriptures reveal what that counſel is. To them alone, then, let their advocates honeſtly appeal; whilſt they lay them open to the freeſt and faireſt diſcuſſion.

It muſt be acknowledged, indeed, to be comparatively a ſmall matter what religious ſentiments men embrace, unleſs in the whole of their conduct they pay an inviolable regard to truth and ſincerity. But it muſt be remembered, on the one hand, that they who continue ſincere and ſteady in the profeſſion of their religious opinions, will be diſpoſed uniformly to enliſt in the ſervice of truth; and, on the other hand, that if, in the common affairs of life, they diſtinguiſh themſelves as the friends of truth, they will enter with ſurpriſing advantages in their favour upon the conſiderations of religion, and will be moſt likely to attain thoſe certain and happy principles which nothing will

ever

ever efface, which may make them wiſer and better in the preſent ſtate, and render them bleſſed for ever.

The virtues and the vices are always in cloſe compact, in firm alliance. They who diſtinguiſh themſelves by a love and regard for truth, ſtand very high in the opinion and eſteem of the wiſe and good. Theſe are the perſons to whom others entruſt their lives, their property, or whatever they hold dear. Mankind are perſuaded that ſuch perſons will not betray the confidence which is placed in them. A high ſenſe of honour uſually dwells with them. Every thing mean they regard with abhorrence.

Surely there is a beautiful conſiſtency, a delightful harmony, in the union of the virtues. In perſons of real honour, of ſteady integrity, there is a noble foundation laid for a temple conſecrated to religion and general goodwill.

But kind affection and brotherly love cannot have any place in thoſe who have thrown aſide all regard for truth; in thoſe who are devoted to inſincerity and deceit: For wherefore ſhould they be inſincere, wherefore ſhould they deceive, but for their own private and particular intereſt? Whatever pretenſions they may make to generoſity, charity, or piety, it may juſtly be queſtioned whether theſe diſpoſitions ſpring from the heart; or whether, in reality, they are not aſſumed for ſome intereſted purpoſe; to ſecure the good opinion of the world, to acquire advantage, or fame.—Truth, therefore, is worthy to be ſought, and fit to be cultivated, for its own ſake, and for the ſake alſo of

thoſe laſting advantages with which it is generally attended.

The greateſt and beſt characters, in every age, have been eminent for the moſt ſacred regard to truth. They have not only ſearched for knowledge with unremitting perſeverance, but they have cheriſhed in their minds thoſe noble and honourable principles, which ſet them above every temptation to falſehood and deceit.

Of Jeſus Chriſt, particularly, it is written, that "guile was not to be found in his mouth." He himſelf gave this glorious teſtimony to Nathaniel, that he was "an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there was no guile." It was conſidered as a blot in the character of Peter, that in the hour of danger he meanly denied his maſter. Their perſiſting in an oſtentatious and impudent lie was the cauſe of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Their ſad fate was unqueſtionably intended as a warning to the diſciples to perſevere in the paths of ſincerity and truth. Had the diſciples not thus perſevered, chriſtianity might have ſunk into everlaſting oblivion. For who would give credit to thoſe who are not the followers of truth, yet who conſtantly appeal to the ſincerity of their teſtimony?

With what manly indignation did Jeſus expoſe the evaſion and inſincerity of the Phariſees! With what animation did he expreſs himſelf at the bar of Pilate! "For this end was I born, and for this cauſe came I "into the world, that I might bear witneſs to the "truth." What ſimplicity and ſincerity does he recommend in the precept, "Let your communication

"be

" be yea, yea; nay, nay." If the paſſage be rendered, " Let your yes be yes, and your no, no," chriſtians have a precept which forbids every kind of deceit, and enjoins the ſtricteſt veracity. Wherefore, indeed, ſhould there be a revelation, but to enlighten mankind with the knowledge of the truth, and to furniſh them with thoſe juſt principles which would keep them faithful and ſteadfaſt to the end? " Sanctify my diſ- " ciples," prayed Jeſus, " with thy truth: thy word " is truth."—The main corruptions which have been introduced into the chriſtian religion have been the offspring of inſincerity and diſſimulation. They have ſprung from diſhoneſt ſhame, and from a blameable deſire to keep well with the world. Nothing ſo much at preſent prevents the ſpread of the everlaſting goſpel, as that worldly ſpirit and temper which have infected thoſe who call themſelves the diſciples of Chriſt.

When, however, it is written, that the moſt glorious bleſſings are promiſed to the faithful, chriſtians are not to underſtand that the bleſſings will be theirs only who have adopted the right ſyſtem of religious belief; but that all they who faithfully profeſs what they believe upon conviction, who act up to the light within them, and who are ſincere in their opinions and endeavours, will " receive the end of their faith " in the ſalvation of their ſouls."—Truth and ſincerity are at any time the brighteſt jewels in the crown of faith; but nothing ſo much adorns the friends of truth, as a ſteady, apoſtolical virtue, in the midſt of apoſtacy and danger.

O that all the children of men would reſolve to "buy the truth, and ſell it not!" Nor is it only of conſequence that they ſhould be ſteady to their profeſſion; but they ſhould not diſgrace it by a mean, diſhoneſt, or deceitful behaviour. The friends of mankind ſhould approve themſelves juſt and upright and true: They ſhould be particularly cautious in making promiſes; much more in taking oaths. The word of the honeſt ſhould certainly be as good as their oath. The duty of the conſcientious is to conſider carefully what is right, and what is wrong; and then, without entering into unneceſſary engagements, to do the right, and decline the wrong. Great is the force of example. If the otherwiſe well-diſpoſed and enlightened make raſh promiſes, or take oaths in a heedleſs manner, there are thoſe who, guided by low intereſt and miſtaken ſelf-love, will make light of their word, and will not ſcruple to perjure themſelves in the ſight of the Moſt High God.

Surely when approved and popular moraliſts conſider a great multitude of the oaths taken in this country as matter of courſe, and of little ſignification, it becomes the friends of mankind to ſhew the fallacy of their reaſonings. Whatever commandments they break, whatever duties they decline, whatever injuſtice they commit, they in fact, in a degree, teach others to do the ſame.

Hence we ſhould cautiouſly avoid all thoſe practices, which, however they may be underſtood, however they may be explained away, have certainly a baneful influence

influence on thoſe whom ſome may chooſe to call the lower ranks in ſociety. If ſervants, for inſtance, be ordered to ſay that thoſe whom they ſerve are not at home, when they are indiſpoſed or engaged, *they*, at leaſt, are taught to lie; and, with a cowardly ſpirit, are uſed as the inſtruments of injuſtice. Why would not the real truth do? and where is the harm of telling improper viſitors that the wiſe and good do not wiſh for any intimacy with them?

The world may gild over theſe venial offences, as ſome may think proper to call them, and may make nice diſtinctions between greater and ſmaller falſehoods; but it is impoſſible by any arguments to defend the injuſtice of deceit; and it may be ſaid of the moſt innocent who are given to its practice, that they are deceiving themſelves, and ſo relaxing the ſacred obligations of morality; till, in the time of temptation, they themſelves become totally defenceleſs, and at once enter, without any reſiſtance or compunction, into the ſervice of treachery and lying.

Many profeſs to be ſhocked with a profane oath; and I know not why they ſhould be leſs ſo with every inſtance of diſſimulation among the children of men. An oath of this kind may proceed from the tranſient emotions of paſſion; but guile of every kind iſſues from the deliberate determination of the heart, and is therefore worſe in its nature, and more dreadful in its influential conſequences.

Theſe arguments ſhould lead well-diſpoſed minds to be equally correct in *procuring* and communicating information,

formation, and to beware of that too common propenſity to fiction and embelliſhment, in thoſe who have gained the unfortunate character of telling a good ſtory.

Surely it ſhews no great genius to tell an extravagant lie; nor can any dependence be placed on thoſe who are habitually addicted to the practice.

It is particularly incumbent upon children to attend to theſe obſervations.

Nothing is ſo tender as character and reputation: If they be once loſt, they are ſcarcely, if ever, recovered.

On theſe accounts, it is wrong and dangerous to tell a falſehood even in jeſt.

If the young thus mock at the ſacred obligations of truth; if they thus wantonly ſport with what is invaluable; if, for their pleaſure and amuſement, they can lie and deceive; it will eaſily be conceived that any preſent intereſt will, with greater force, compel them to the ſame artful and diſingenuous conduct.

How far they may be led away from truth and ſincerity, what lengths they may go in the path of falſehood, what ſhocking and deteſtable habits they may form of diſhoneſt meanneſs and lying, they may eaſily gather, when they reflect that one lie may require many lies to make it good; that they may repeat them frequently to many perſons, till no one will have any thing to do with them; and that in deſpair they may commit actions which may involve them in miſery, or bring them to an untimely end.

For this reaſon parents ſhould be on their guard, leſt children ſhould catch the infection of deceit from them.

Their offspring will very ſoon take them for their pattern: ſtrong, then, ſhould be their motives to ſet them a good example.

When parents conſider what influence they have over their children, they ſhould be doubly cautious, for their own ſakes and for theirs, not to be inſincere, or to deceive. Hence they are in ſome meaſure accountable to God for the future conduct of the riſing generation.

If parents do not aim to cheriſh in their children a love and regard for truth; if they always ſpeak and act at random, and ſometimes with a bad, deceitful, treacherous, and artful deſign, they may be ſure the guilt of their offspring will pour a torrent of miſery upon them; their repentance will be their torture, even though it ſhould produce their own amendment. It is ineffectual, becauſe it is too late; it cannot remedy the evil which has been occaſioned, becauſe the evil has been done to the mind of another. But if, on the other hand, they cultivate in their children a ſacred regard for truth and ſincerity, and if they ſet them examples ſuited to recommend theſe excellent virtues, they will be bleſſed with their good and dutiful behaviour; they will rejoice in the good character, in the unſullied reputation, which they have enabled them to acquire and maintain; they will receive increaſing pleaſure and ſatisfaction from the con-

conſciouſneſs that they have fulfilled their duty, and anſwered the ends of a wiſe and good Providence, by bringing up thoſe who will ſerve him on earth, and be admitted along with them into the happy family of heaven.

FINIS.

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